

From the Parish Priest,

I write this letter on the Wednesday of Holy Week 2020, conscious of the First Reading at today's Mass; 'a disciples tongue... to reply to the wearied.'
Isaiah wrote in challenging times, trying to bring consolation to troubled people, and hoping he was able, somehow, to give reassurance that God remains faithful to the people whom He called His own, even when He seemed to be absent from them.

Many, many kind parishioners have been in touch with me during these past weeks - by letter, telephone and e-mail. Almost without exception, they have offered reassurance and encouragement; and I know that this has been the case in contacts made between parishioners. The relationships that we can build in a Parish community bear much fruit at times like these, and when we are able to return to the rhythm of Parish life we must find ways of celebrating what we have in our Parish, and of extending the scope of what we can offer to each other.

It is a strange experience, offering Mass in an empty Church with no flowers, no candles and no atmosphere. For someone whose spirituality is largely formed by and around the Liturgy this is not an easy time. It does however, remind us that our worship is directed to God 'who has no need of our praise, but has gifted the desire to thank Him, and grow in His grace' (Preface IV, weekdays).

There have been new discoveries, however, which others may have come upon - and for me this has mainly been to recognise and appreciate the power of our intercessory prayer - our praying for each other, even when we are separated from those we know so well. I congratulate the ladies of the UCM who have remained in constant touch with one another through their 'WhatsApp' prayer group; and I thank Deacon Adam Nicholls who has provided a steady selection of reflections and suggestions for Holy Week observance through the good offices of the Catholic Men's Society. Those who are able to view our Parish website will have noted the very moving Daily Refelctions that Joseph has published each day.

It is a disappointment that we are not able to provide live streaming of Masses and Devotions from our own Church. Many parishioners have been able to participate in 'streamed' Masses from Walsingham, St. Chad's Cathedral and other Parish churches in the Diocese and further afield.

During the Liturgy of Good Friday we have the long series of Intercessions and an additional one has been composed for this year 'For the afflicted in time of pandemic.' It is extremely beautiful and summarises the prayers and thoughts that all of us would want to express:

'Almighty and ever-living God
only support of our human weakness,
look with compassion upon the sorrowful condition of your children
who suffer because of his pandemic;
relieve the pain of the sick,
give strength to those who care for them,
welcome into your peace those who have died
and, throughout this time of tribulation,
grant that we may all find comfort in your merciful love.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.'

In her address to us on Sunday evening; Her Majesty the Queen noted that this could be a time for prayer and reflection, and many of us are finding that it is like an extended retreat, with periods of reading, exercise, prayer and generally trying to come to terms with what is a new experience for most of us.

So, let us all continue to pray for each other, and to provide reassurance and support, especially to those who are particularly anxious and vulnerable. For the time being, the Archbishop has recommended that we do not follow our usual course of ministry but please keep in touch with the Rectory at any time if there is serious need.

At the moment, it is difficult to imagine what it will be like when we gather once more for Mass, and in our many Parish groups. When that time comes, it will be a joyous moment when the idea of Resurrection will surely have new significance for all of us. May the Risen Christ uphold us and sustain us until that time comes, and may the prayers of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Ambrose and St. Pius X be added to our prayers for each other.

Fr. Douglas Lamb.

I would be grateful if those reading this Letter will share its contents with others who may not be able access it. Thank you.